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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PL](#)
SUBJECT: RIGHT-WING RADICALS CONTROL POLISH PUBLIC
TELEVISION

REF: A. DUBLIN 99
[1](#)B. WARSAW 301

Classified By: Political Counselor Daniel Sainz for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Piotr Farfal, a former skinhead affiliated with the nationalistic League of Polish Families (LPR), remains in control of Polish Public Television (TVP) -- opinions remain divided on just how long he will manage to stay in office. Barring a serious Farfal misstep, the only mechanism for removing Farfal is passage of a new media law to reconstitute the National Broadcasting Council, which oversees TVP's supervisory board. In the five months since Farfal took over TVP, the network has devoted disproportionate attention to Declan Ganely's Libertas party, which recently announced plans to run a joint slate of candidates with LPR in June's European Parliament elections. PM Tusk has the votes needed to override an anticipated presidential veto of the new media law, but President Kaczynski could instead submit the measure to the Constitutional Tribunal, since he alleges it gives Tusk too much control over public media. END SUMMARY.

HOW COULD THIS HAVE HAPPENED?

[1](#)2. (C) In December 2008, the supervisory board of Polish Public Television (TVP) suspended then-president Andrzej Urbanski an appointee of the former Law and Justice (PiS) government. In a surprise move, the board replaced Urbanski with Piotr Farfal, a member of the nationalistic League of Polish Families (LPR) party, one-time skinhead, and former editor of an anti-Semitic newspaper. At the time, Farfal and allies from LPR and the populist Self-Defense (SO) pledged to "depoliticize" TVP, which Urbanski had used as a platform to criticize PM Tusk and his center-right Civic Platform (PO). (NB: Because the supervisory board was appointed by the former PiS-LPR-SO coalition government, representatives of the current coalition government are in the minority.)

[1](#)3. (C) Farfal acted quickly to solidify control of TVP, dismissing high-level PiS appointees in his first month in office and replacing them with inexperienced LPR members, many of whom had been leaders of the xenophobic All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska). Farfal's subsequent installation of LPR associates in key regional positions drew widespread complaints that unqualified personnel with political agendas had been put in charge of local programming, supplanting professionals with ideologically driven hacks.

POLITICAL DEPOLITICIZATION

[1](#)4. (C) Under Farfal's leadership, TVP -- in contrast to independent TV networks -- has devoted a disproportionate share of programming time to Declan Ganley's Libertas Party, including Ganley's appearances in Poland. Libertas Poland, under the leadership of former LPR member and one-time

All-Polish Youth head Artur Zawisza, has made strong inroads into LPR's ultra-conservative, nationalist base. On April 20, Zawisza announced Libertas, LPR, and other right-wing parties would run a joint slate of candidates for June's European Parliament elections. Farfal is also accused of using TVP as a platform to criticize the opposition PiS. Farfal and other LPR members reportedly took deep offense at PiS chair Jaroslaw Kaczynski's January call for voters to "forget" PiS's ill-fated 2005-2007 coalition with LPR and SO.

15. (C) In early April, Tomasz Rudomino, an SO member who helped orchestrate Farfal's December takeover of TVP, accused Farfal of betraying his pledge to depoliticize public television. Rudomino predicted that TVP's supervisory board would never dismiss Farfal, because Farfal had "bought the votes" of other board members. As predicted, Farfal survived -- by one vote -- the April 14 TVP supervisory board vote on his dismissal.

16. (C) From the beginning of Farfal's tenure, politicians from PiS, PO, and the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) alleged that Farfal reported directly to Giertych, the controversial former head of LPR. Giertych, who stepped down as party chair after LPR failed to qualify for parliamentary representation in the 2007 elections, has repeatedly insisted he no longer has any influence in the party. In a March meeting with Poloffs, Giertych expressed satisfaction with the success of his post-2007 legal practice, describing his plans to expand the firm. "I am just an advisor to LPR," he said with a smirk. Asked to comment on the allegations that he, not Farfal, was in charge of TVP, Giertych argued that PiS is the only party dissatisfied with the current TVP

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leadership. Consistent with that claim, some members of PiS have accused PO of tacitly supporting Farfal, a charge government officials deny.

GIERTYCH'S PLAN FOR LIMITING EU INTEGRATION

17. (C) In his March meeting with the Embassy, Giertych expressed confidence that Poles would find the Libertas/LPR coalition more attractive than PiS in the long term. He argued that an EU-wide party would yield more influence and appeal to fickle Polish voters who are always looking for "the next, best thing." He argued that Libertas/LPR voters are not "euroskeptics," although he could not mask his pleasure with Nicolas Sarkozy's protectionist impulses, which he said could spell the death of the EU. Giertych said Libertas/LPR supporters are merely wary of ceding additional sovereignty to Brussels; he claimed as many as 40 percent of Poles still oppose the Lisbon Treaty. Giertych conceded that LPR had "gone too far" in its anti-EU rhetoric in the past. Moving forward, he said, Libertas/LPR will concentrate on limiting Brussels' (i.e., Germany, France and the UK's) influence on Member States. Giertych predicted that PiS voters would start to gravitate toward Libertas, particularly if the economic crisis worsens.

ALL EYES ON THE MEDIA LAW

18. (C) With the TVP supervisory board and the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) firmly in the hands of Farfal supporters, the only sure way to remove Farfal and his appointees is to pass legislation establishing a new Broadcasting Council. Following months of negotiation between coalition parties and the opposition Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), a draft media law passed its first reading in the Sejm April 23. The bill eliminates mandatory service fees for TV viewers and establishes a new seven-person National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) -- three to be appointed by the Sejm, two by the President, and two by the Senate.

19. (C) The new KRRiT will take decisions by a simple majority, instead of the current 2/3 supermajority, and will

receive funding directly from the Government budget. Culture Minister Zdrojewski (Civic Platform, PO) defended the legislation and said the GOP is committed to its quick passage, particularly in light of growing public pressure to dismiss Farfal. With support from SLD, the media bill -- expected to pass by September -- is effectively veto-proof. President Kaczynski, who has -- ironically -- criticized the bill because it gives the PO Government too much influence over appointees, could still decide to send it to the Constitutional Tribunal. (NB: Independent media experts have also expressed concern that the bill gives the Government too much influence over TVP's budget.) The newly appointed Broadcasting Council's first order of business would likely be Farfal's dismissal.

WHERE'S THE OUTRAGE?

¶10. (C) Mainstream public opinion has consistently expressed dissatisfaction with Farfal's leadership of TVP, e.g., withdrawing from TVP's 5 million PLN commitment to co-finance a Hallmark film about Irena Sendler, a Pole who saved thousands of Jewish children during the Holocaust. Farfal was also roundly condemned for announcing that TVP would no longer support Belsat programming for Belarus (ref B) and for firing Belsat's director. (NB: Farfal rescinded the announcement and reinstated Belsat's director under pressure from the MFA, which funds almost all Belsat operations.) Most recently, TVP officials dismissed popular news announcer Hanna Lis, after she refused to read a statement -- inserted at the behest of TVP management -- alleging PO interference in the preparation of a think-tank report that had criticized LPR-affiliated European parliamentarians as ineffective.

¶11. (C) A group of Polish artists, writers, and intellectuals, including Agnieszka Holland, Andrzej Wajda, and Marek Edelman, have been outspoken in their criticism of Farfal. Some have faulted the Government for not doing enough to remove Farfal or at least limit his influence. Renowned film director Krzysztof Krauze called for Poles to boycott TVP's coverage of Polish Constitution Day ceremonies on May 3, which is also World Press Freedom Day. Mainstream public opinion has not echoed the outrage of Poland's political and cultural elite. Although genuinely embarrassed by Farfal, it seems most Poles see the current arrangement as an unfortunate by-product of PiS's coalition with LPR and SO -- one that will be removed when the new media bill is passed.

COMMENT

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¶12. (C) Despite TVP's promotion of LPR/Libertas, the new political grouping enjoys only marginal support among Polish euroskeptics, who remain -- for now -- loyal to PiS. This is, in part, because PiS received the endorsement of the ultraconservative Radio Maryja and its director, Father Rydzyk. LPR/Libertas continues to poll well below the five percent threshold for parliamentary representation. While LPR/Libertas will remain in lock-step through June's European Parliament elections, the mixture of weak leadership, strong personalities vying for control, and a poor showing at the polls will likely cause old divisions to resurface afterwards. ASHE